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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 001449

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA -- A HOUSE DIVIDED: MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN  
SREBRENICA

REF: A) SARAJEVO 1423 B) SARAJEVO 1112 C) SARAJEVO 816

Classified By: Michael J. Murphy, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The campaign to register 1991 residents of Srebrenica to vote in municipal elections there has leveled the political playing field in the municipality for Bosniaks, whose demographic profile in Srebrenica reflects the genocide and ethnic cleansing that took place in and around the municipality. The number of registered Bosniaks voters now exceeds the number of registered Serb voters, which means Bosniaks have an opportunity to retain control of the Srebrenica mayoralty and secure a majority in the Municipal Assembly. Nonetheless, Bosniak success is by no means assured. Two Bosniak candidates are competing for Bosniak votes: one from a Party for Democratic Action (SDA) - Party for BiH (SBiH) coalition; the other from the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Though SDA has always dominated Srebrenica municipal politics, Naser Oric, former wartime commander of the enclave and a hero to many in the community, has endorsed the SDP candidate. Though SDP has traditionally had little success in Srebrenica, these political divisions have the potential to split the Bosniak vote and allow one of the two Serb candidates to win the mayoralty -- an outcome that would likely spark yet another political crisis over Srebrenica. A split in the Serb vote would reduce the potential consequences of a Bosniak split. RS PM Dodik's party has not waged a particularly energetic campaign in Srebrenica thus far. The opposition Serb Democratic Party (SDS) has used its Srebrenica campaign to amplify its RS-wide campaign message that Dodik and his party are corrupt, citing RS government-funded road construction in Srebrenica as an example. END SUMMARY.

Voter Registration Project Levels Playing Field  
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12. (SBU) Shortly after the Bosnian parliament amended BiH Election Law to allow all 1991 residents of Srebrenica Municipality the option to vote there in the upcoming municipal elections (Ref C), we met with the Central Election Commission (CEC) to discuss its plans to implement the law and for a voter registration/get-out-the-vote campaign. We provided financial support for the latter, which was aimed at Diaspora voters, displaced persons throughout Bosnia, and 1991 Srebrenica residents. (Note: The Dutch and the Swedes also provided financial support for the CEC program. End Note) The Srebrenica-related voter registration drive ended on August 21. More than 5,000 1991 residents of Srebrenica, virtually all of them Bosniaks, registered to vote as part of

this drive. According to the CEC, there are now approximately 15,400 people registered to vote in Srebrenica; approximately 8,300 Bosniaks, and 7,000 Serbs. However, in view of the potential for Bosniaks to split their vote among two leading Bosniak candidates, it is not clear that a Bosniak will retain the mayoralty. Bosniak parties ) the SDA, the Party for BiH (SBiH), and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) ) are also seeking to retain control of the 27-seat Municipal Assembly. They currently hold 17 seats.

#### SDA's Lackluster Campaign

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13. (C) SDA is the dominant Bosniak party in Srebrenica. The incumbent mayor Abduraham Malkic is from SDA, and SDA holds 13 seats on the Assembly. After a bitter internal party battle, SDA nominated Osman Suljic for mayor despite that fact that many Bosniak Srebrenica residents preferred Malkic. (Ref B) (Note: SDA and SBiH are running in coalition in Srebrenica. SBiH has just two seats in the Municipal Assembly. End Note) Suljic, a member of Srebrenica's wartime presidency, was one of the last to leave Srebrenica in July 1995, sending a final plea for help before fleeing into the woods. He is now the deputy director of a mineral company in Tuzla, but has committed to moving back to Srebrenica should he be elected mayor. A number of our contacts in Srebrenica were critical of Suljic's campaign thus far, noting that it lacked energy and urgency. They were also critical of more senior SDA politicians for their failure to play a more active role in the campaign.

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#### SDP's Unpopular Former Policeman

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15. (C) The nominally multi-ethnic, but pre-dominantly Bosniak Social Democratic Party (SDP) refused to join the SDA-SBiH coalition in Srebrenica and instead chose to run its own candidate for mayor, Hakiija Meholic. Meholic, a Bosniak and former wartime Srebrenica police chief, is regarded as uneducated and divisive by most of our Srebrenica contacts, including representatives of the Mothers' Associations. Nonetheless, as a current Srebrenica resident who has been active in Srebrenica politics, he has wider name recognition than Suljic. Meholic also played a prominent role in the 2007 Srebrenica secession and tent city movement. SDP has traditionally had little political success in Srebrenica -- the party has just two seats on the Assembly, including Meholic -- but party president Zlatko Lagumdžija has told us several times that he believes Meholic can win. Lagumdžija claims that Srebrenica Bosniaks were angered by SDA Srebrenica party chief and state-level MP Sadik Ahmetovic's successful attempt to deprive Malkic of SDA's mayoral nomination and are now prepared to desert the party.

#### The War Hero Backs Meholic

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16. (C) In July, Naser Oric, the former military commander of Srebrenica during the 1992-1995 war, publicly labeled Suljic's nomination by SDA a "catastrophic solution" and endorsed Meholic. Oric, who is a hero among Bosniak Srebrenica residents (and many other Bosniaks) for his 1992-1993 defense of the enclave, also blamed Tihic and Ahmetovic for the Bosniak divisions in Srebrenica. Oric, who was convicted of war crimes in The Hague, but later acquitted on appeal, is a villain in the eyes of Bosnian Serbs throughout the Republika Srpska (RS). Local political contacts have told us that Meholic is benefiting from the support of Naser Oric and his network of criminal associates, though Oric himself has kept a low public profile since his July comments. Ahmetovic has expressed concern to us privately about Oric's growing influence in Srebrenica. On September 5, in a not so-veiled attack on Suljic's war time record, Meholic suggested that Bosniak leaders "sold"

Srebrenica to the RS (and abetted genocide) when "key members of the international community started saying publicly that enclaves cannot survive." (Note: Oric, who left Srebrenica in 1993, was not asked to defend it in 1995; ever since there have been accusations that the then Bosnian leadership deliberately allowed the enclave to fall. End Note)

#### SNSD's Quiet Campaign

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17. (C) Four RS-based parties have seats in the current Municipal Assembly: RS PM Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) holds four seats; the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) holds three; the Party for Democratic Progress (PDP) holds two; and, the Democratic People's Party (DNS) holds one. SNSD has fielded what many consider the strongest Serb candidate for mayor, Milos Vukosavljevic. According to our local contacts, he is not a well-known figure in Srebrenica, but is a former mining engineer not known to have been associated with any of the wartime atrocities of the area. SNSD officials have told us that the party is investing little time and energy into the campaign in rural municipalities in the Eastern RS (Ref A). Based on information provided by local contacts, this includes Srebrenica -- at least thus far. Nonetheless, Radomir Pavlovic, SNSD Chairman of the Srebrenica Municipal Assembly, estimates Vukosavljevic would get 80 percent of the Serb vote. (Note: By law, the Chairman of the Municipal Assembly and the mayor cannot come from the same ethnic group. If Vukosavljevic won the mayoralty, Pavlovic would lose his chairmanship. End Note)

#### SDS Highlights Srebrenica RS-Wide

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18. (C) SDS, running in coalition in Srebrenica with PDP, has nominated Svetozar Marinkovic for mayor. Marinkovic, a doctor by profession, is reportedly an SDS hardliner, but

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there have been no allegations that he was involved in any of the wartime atrocities that took place in Srebrenica. SDS and Marinkovic have accused Dodik and several other senior RS officials of stealing 25 million KM (approximately 18 million USD) by padding the contract for the resurfacing of the Jezero-Skelani road in the municipality. (Note: The road was part of a series of investment measures announced by the RS in the wake of the ICJ verdict designed to improve socio-economic conditions in Srebrenica. End Note) The resurfacing contract was awarded to "Niskogradnja" company, owned by a Dodik friend, Ljubo Cubic. The contract was then expanded, according to reporting in "Dani," to include additional resurfacing in the Srebrenica-Bratunac region. By media calculations, the total amount of spending would have reached around 1.6 million KM per kilometer, the highest cost per distance in Bosnia. Dodik, predictably, has called the charges baseless, pointed to World Bank statement praising RS economic development, and suggested that Principal Deputy High Representative (PDHR) Gregorian is behind these accusations.

#### Comment

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19. (C) Srebrenica will be one of the most watched municipalities on election night. Should Bosniak internal divisions result in the election of a Serb mayor and Serb control of the Municipal Assembly, Bosniaks would undoubtedly cast the outcome as "an affirmation of genocide." This would likely be followed by an intense, national-level media debate among Bosniaks over "who lost Srebrenica?" In meetings with us, Bosniaks such as the Srebrenica Mothers' Associations have commented that they will hold SDA President Tihic and Sadik Ahmetovic responsible should a Bosniak candidate fail to take the mayor's office. That said, we would not be surprised if the Bosniak political leadership sought to

transfer blame to the international community, including the U.S., despite everything the U.S. has done to support Srebrenica and level the political playing field for the Bosniaks there.

ENGLISH